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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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***Testimony of Senator Teresa S. Pierce introducing
LD 1064, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary
before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 6, 2023***

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennen, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Teresa Pierce, and I represent Senate District 25, which includes Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth (majority), Gray, and Long Island. Today, I am pleased to introduce LD 1064, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary.

Maine and the nation are facing a critical shortage in teachers, and specifically in Maine, we have an unprecedented number of teachers leaving the profession. According to MainePERS, the number of classroom teachers leaving their profession and choosing not to continue teaching has increased every year from 246 in 2017 to 596 in 2022. The number of educators leaving the profession has more than doubled in 6 years. This is a startling figure and one that requires our immediate attention.

Why are people leaving the profession or not going into this profession? We could spend years analyzing this question, the impact of the pandemic, the aging workforce, too many other opportunities etc. But a simpler answer is supported by a report released this month by the consultancy firm McKinsey: One-third of American K-12 educators are contemplating leaving their jobs, citing compensation as the No. 1 reason.

Teaching is much, much harder than it used to be, and salaries have not kept pace with the work required or with private sector jobs.

At \$37,580 a year, the average starting teacher salary in Maine is the lowest in New England and ninth-lowest in the nation. If we are to ensure that our students are being taught by the best and the brightest, and that we're doing all we can to encourage people to choose to teach, we must acknowledge that the starting salary is far too low.

Current college-age students and high schoolers are making decisions right now about what their careers might be. Enrollment numbers in programs that lead to teacher certification are down 5.6% in Fall 2022. Fewer are giving teaching strong consideration. If they are, they might be more inclined to think about moving out of Maine, to another state where the starting salary is higher. If we head south on I-95 to Connecticut, their legislature is currently contemplating a bill that would raise their teachers' starting salary from \$47,000 to \$60,000.

LD 1064 would increase the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000 incrementally over the next five years. The step increments, as used in this bill, are geared toward allowing school districts to prepare and adjust for the change. Our teacher shortage is only going to grow, as a majority of Maine's teacher workforce will be retiring in the next 5-10 years. We need to prepare now and start aggressively recruiting and retaining teachers for a wave of employment opportunities in our public schools.

I urge you to pass LD 1064. Maine students, Maine teachers — indeed all Mainers — will benefit from this change.